

Data depicting the American electoral system can be described as a descending stepladder, where each rung has a smaller share of the electorate. While the U.S. Census Bureau reports the total nationwide population for 2006 as being 299.4 million persons, not everyone can participate in the election. Persons have to be at least 18 years of age (voting age population, or VAP), be United States citizens, and some States prohibit felons and mentally incompetent persons from participating in the election process.

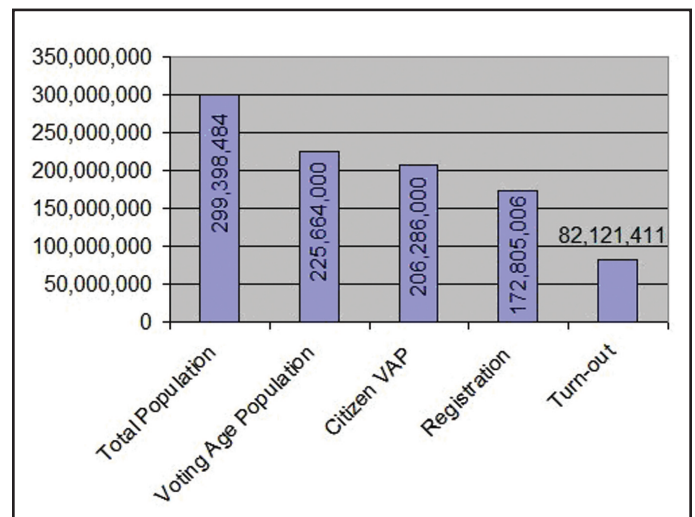
People eligible to vote must register to vote in their local jurisdiction and once registered, voters need to remember to participate in the election by turning out to vote. Each step on this electoral ladder finds a smaller number who are exercising their franchise. The voting participation data for the 2006 general election, as reported by the Election Assistance Commission (EAC), is captured in Figure 1.

This report of the EAC is the result of extensive data collection brought about by the *2006 Election Administration and Voting Survey*. Other EAC reports based on this survey include one on registration and the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, and a second report on the voting statistics of military and foreign voters covered by the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA). All of these are available on the EAC's Web site at www.eac.gov.

Nearly 173 million persons were reported to be registered to vote for the 2006 elections—an increase of nearly 12.1 million over the four-year period since the last midterm election. In the two-year period since the 2004 Presidential election, however, the number of registered voters has decreased. In 2004, there were nearly 176.2 million registered voters in the nation; this number declined to 172.8 million for the 2006 elections. For 2006, the registration number represents a registration rate of 76.6 percent of the VAP (and 83.8 percent of the citizen voting age population or CVAP) in the

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Figure 1. The American Electorate 2006



affected States and territories, an increase from the 74.7 percent registration rate of VAP recorded for the 2002 elections.

This EAC study found slightly more than 82 million ballots were cast or counted in the 2006 election. Overall, 39.8 percent of the nation's citizen voting age population participated in the 2006 election. This varied by State, however, with Vermont (66 percent) and Maine (64 percent) leading the States with the highest participation rates. When turnout is calculated as a percentage of registered voters, the nationwide average for 2006 was 47.5 percent. Wyoming led the nation, reporting that 79.9 percent of its registered voters participated in the election, followed by Vermont (72.9 percent), Oregon (71.2 percent), and South Dakota (71 percent).

While there is a significant level of uncertainty in the data reported from the States due to missing information, jurisdictions reported that ballots were cast or counted in the following ways:

- 78.4 percent (64,356,295) were cast or counted in a polling place on election day.
- 13.8 percent (11,317,719) were cast or counted as an absentee ballot by domestic civilians.
- 6.4 percent (5,271,333) were cast or counted as an early vote.
- 1.0 percent (794,348) were cast or counted as a provisional vote.
- 0.4 percent (333,179) were cast or counted by Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) voters.

While nationwide voting takes place primarily in a polling place on election day, there are great variations among the States. Generally, voters in the western region of the nation tend to use the absentee ballot process more, while voters in the East traditionally vote at their local polling place.

On election day 2006, slightly more than 794,000 individuals cast a provisional ballot—just one percent of all persons who participated and 1.3 percent of those who voted in a polling place. More than 629,000 provisional ballots were counted, which was 79.5 percent of all the provisional ballots cast. Most States require voters to have voted in their home precinct for their vote to be counted, but a smaller number of States do not require voters to cast their ballots in their precinct for the provisional ballot to be counted or partially counted.

California and Ohio had the largest numbers of provisional ballots of all the States, accounting for more than 52 percent of all provisional ballots cast

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in the 2006 election nationwide. Arizona (at 9.68 percent) and Washington (at 8.31 percent) had the largest percentage of their polling place voters casting provisional ballots. Alaska (6.46 percent), California (5.32 percent), Colorado (3.77 percent), the District of Columbia (3.67 percent), Ohio (3.56 percent), Kansas (3.11 percent), Utah (3.00 percent), and Maryland (2.58 percent) all reported more than twice the nationwide average of polling place voters who cast provisional ballots.

Nearly 30 percent of the jurisdictions across the country reported multiple voting systems in use. The 2006 data show there has been a dramatic rise in the number of jurisdictions using electronic systems compared to what was previously reported in the EAC's 2004 study. In 2004, just 9.3 percent of the jurisdictions reported using electronic voting equipment, but this increased to 53.6 percent two years later.

The EAC survey found that in nearly two-thirds of the jurisdictions that reported data, there were 691,349 poll workers employed on election day 2006. In addition, there were nearly 180,000 precincts located in almost 113,000 polling places across the nation.

According to the States reporting, 87.7 percent of the polling places allowed access for voters with disabilities, and 84.5 percent allowed these voters to cast a private ballot.